



Socialist Forums

From SACP web site, downloaded 14 June 2013

One of the most important tasks to be carried out by the Party amongst the workers is systematic and on-going political development of organised workers.

Whilst this is not the only function that needs to be carried out by the SACP industrial/workplace units, it is perhaps the most significant. In fact, there is a dialectical relationship between the establishment of SACP workplace structures and the regular holding and convening of socialist forums. The establishment of SACP industrial/workplace units will greatly enhance and facilitate the political development and education of workers. The converse is also true. The holding of regular socialist forums will greatly facilitate the formation of SACP industrial/workplace units, in that an increasing number of workers will be drawn and be schooled in socialist theory and ideology.

The aims of socialist forums

- a. Socialist forums should be regular forums held for workers to discuss and educate workers in Marxism-Leninism both in its international context as well as within the context of our national democratic revolution and the struggle for socialism.
- b. The focus of socialist forums should be to deepen the political consciousness of workers by also discussing topical and current political and policy issues from the standpoint of the working class

- c. Discussion of workplace issues and the question of the democratisation of the workplace and the empowerment of workers, in order to enhance their ability to impact on workplace decisions
- d. The focus of socialist forums should be on shop-stewards, women workers and other layers of worker leadership closer to the workplace
- e. To further deepen the relationship and co-operation between the SACP and the labour movement
- f. Underpinning our goals in convening socialist forums should also be to ensure that workers, particularly worker leadership, understands the role of the SACP as well as the general strengthening of the labour movement itself.

Implementation

- a. The holding of socialist forums should be driven at a number of levels but in a co-ordinated and systematic fashion. The holding of socialist forums should be arranged through joint structures between the SACP and COSATU unions at provincial and local/district levels
- b. Socialist forums should not necessarily replace, but can complement or be the form in which regular and ongoing political education for workers takes place. Such forums must be held on regular days (eg.fortnightly). They are different from, though they can complement, political schools held between the SACP and affiliate unions.
- c. Socialist forums can also be flexibly convened to cover workers in a particular sector (eg teachers) or combining workers in various sectors in a particular locality
- d. The SACP structures, particularly industrial/workplace units, should play an active role in ensuring that such forums are organised and held regularly on a sustainable basis
- e. Provincial leadership, as part of Red October preparations should discuss plans for regular holding of such forums in key identified localities as pilot studies

From: <http://www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=2644>



Secretaries, General Secretaries, Chairpersons and Presidents

ANC

In the **ANC** branch, the Chairperson is the head and political leader. The Secretary is busy and important and is a leader but is not "the decider" as compared to the Chairperson. This arrangement contributes a lot to the special "feel" and personality of the ANC, which is different from other organisations. It fits well, and South African people are comfortable with it. It is a "South African characteristic" by now.

The priority of the Chairperson in the ANC goes all the way up to President and Secretary-General, so that Cde Jacob Zuma is the recognised leader of the ANC, and Cde Gwede Mantashe the Secretary-General is junior to him.

SACP

In the **SACP** branch, the Secretary is the leading office bearer and the Chairperson is free to practice the great and vital art of chairpersonship. This arrangement works just as well as the other one, and maybe it works better. It is not a matter of dogma. It can be changed, and changed again. In the Chinese Communist Party, for a long time, in the Mao era, chairperson was top. The General Secretary of the SACP, currently Dr Blade Nzimande, is the leader of the Party.

As things are now, the Party's is by far the clearest, as well as the briefest, Constitution of the major democratic political institutions in South Africa, and the SACP is as much of a "South African characteristic" as the ANC is, by the way.

COSATU

Coming to **COSATU** affiliates, and to COSATU the federation, as so often in trade union business, what you get is something that is a hybrid, and "neither fish nor fowl". Chairperson and Secretary are both still elected. Secretary has political as well as administrative powers, but Chairperson is nominally senior.

A Full Time Shop Steward (FTSS) is a worker leader in a COSATU union. A Chairperson is likewise a worker leader, all the way up to President and Deputies at the NOB level. They are not paid a salary by the organisation, but still drawing their worker's pay, by a prior and generally negotiated agreement, from the employers.

General Secretary and some other full-time secretaries are employees of the organisation itself.

What is the advantage of this system? It is that in COSATU unions, you do tend to get officials who are "from the shop floor", as opposed to some other countries, where General Secretaries, for example, can be people who were employed at an early stage of their lives by the union, and are essentially lifetime trade-union bureaucrats.

How bad would that be? When the NUM was formed, Cyril Ramaphosa, a lawyer, now Deputy President of the ANC, was its first General Secretary. He is remembered as a great one.

Because the GS is not a worker leader position, it may still be possible to elect a non-worker to the GS position, in a COSATU union.

There is no perfect arrangement. Whether democracy exists is a matter of fact. It is not guaranteed by structure. Without structure, it can't exist, but structure alone does not ensure democracy.

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